

WATER WISE GARDENING AND LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE SERIES

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES HOME LAWN IRRIGATION FOR ESTABLISHING A NEW LAWN

The amount of water required to establish a home lawn depends on several things...moisture content of the soil, soil temperature, wind, and germination requirements of different species all influence watering practices.

TYPE OF GRASS - Bermudagrass is commonly grown from stolons and zoysia is often grown from plugs. Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue, though most commonly grown from seed, can also be sodded. Watering will be the same with any of these methods, although establishment from seed may take longer. Also, any of the species mentioned above (tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, buffalograss, zoysia and bermudagrass) can be seeded if adapted varieties are chosen.

SOIL CONDITIONS - Improving the rooting environment by adding organic matter prior to planting and adjusting the pH (acidity/alkalinity) and fertility based on soil test results will promote more efficient water use.

WATERING NEWLY PLANTED GRASS - Grass that is planted at the correct time will use water most efficiently during establishment. September is best for cool season grasses, like tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass; June is preferred for warm season grasses such as bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, and buffalograss.

Immediately after planting, a thorough, deep soaking of the lawn (without causing washing of the seed) is recommended to establish a reservoir of moisture in the top several inches of the soil profile. Dry soil should be watered deeply before planting and then the soil surface allowed to dry enough that the seeding operation can take place.

Thereafter, grass seed needs to be kept moist until the seeds germinate and become established. Initially, keep the surface of the seed bed constantly moist with frequent, shallow irrigation. Light watering once or twice a day may be required to keep the seed bed moist. If the grass seed begins to germinate then dries out, it may die. A light mulch of clean straw can slow drying of the seed bed between watering cycles (you should be able to see exposed soil through the straw layer).

Note: It's possible to water newly seeded bluegrass or tall fescue in the late evening during the fall season. This makes the applied water go further by keeping the seed bed moist throughout the night and into the next morning. Because there are fewer disease problems in the cooler weather of early to mid fall, the chances that nighttime watering will contribute to disease problems is reduced.

After the grass seed emerges, the interval between irrigation cycles can be extended but more water should be applied each time.

When germination is complete and the seedling grass is uniformly one inch tall, stretch the watering interval to every other day, applying 1/4 inch of water each time (measure the water in straight-sided cans as it is applied).

During the second week after complete germination, water every third day, applying 1 inch of water per irrigation cycle. Thereafter, one inch of water every 5 to 7 days should support the stand of new seedling grass.

Note: When seeding in early fall (preferred time), make sure that the grass is thoroughly watered before the ground freezes and during mid-winter thaws if the winter has little snow cover.

NEWLY LAID SOD - Newly installed sod needs to be watered much like a newly seeded lawn, frequently enough to keep the interface between the sod and soil moist until new roots knit down into the soil. Then the watering interval can be extended as discussed for newly seeded lawns, above.

PLUGS OR STOLONS - Plugs and stolons also need to be watered much like seeded lawns. Keep the soil moist until rooting has occurred and then increase the interval between waterings.

Kansas State University is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability, contact Clyde Howard, Director of Affirmative Action, Kansas State University, (TTY) 785-532-4807.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service
K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Fred A. Cholick, Director.